



Fisher Ecology Research Project

Joel Sauder, IDFG, Clearwater Region nongame biologist

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has started a new research project on one of Idaho's least known and most seldom seen wildlife species: the fisher. About the size of a large domestic cat, but with a longer body and shorter legs, the fisher can be envisioned as a cross between a house cat and a dachshund.

As is typical of members of the mustelid family, which includes weasels, martens, and wolverines, fishers have large home ranges for their size (averaging 15 square miles for males and 6 square miles for females) and low population densities. Fishers are generally found in mature forests, with high canopy closure and complex vertical structure (think downed trees, snags, and understory trees). They prey mainly on snowshoe hares, tree squirrels, mice and voles; carrion is a seasonally important food source too.

In Idaho the fisher is ranked as a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" primarily due to



Joel Sauder, the lead researcher on the fisher project, holds a fisher about to be satellite collared.

a poor understanding of distribution, abundance, and the impacts of logging and other forest management practices on their populations. For this reason the Idaho Department of Fish and Game has partnered with Potlatch Forest Holdings, Inc., the University of Idaho, the Idaho Conservation League, the Clearwater National Forest, and the Army Corp of

Engineers to sponsor a new research project dedicated to improving our knowledge of fisher ecology in the Northern Rocky Mountains. Fieldwork started in January 2007 and will continue for several years. Researchers will catch 25-30 adult fishers in north-central Idaho and fit them with satellite telemetry collars. These collars will allow the researchers

to remotely track the movements of individuals for over a year using a network of satellites similar to GPS. These movements will be used to better understand how the habitat composition and configuration influences where fishers live and their behavior.

This project is a great example of how partnerships are facilitating the conservation of our diverse wildlife here in Idaho. The outcome of this research will provide important information to all the partners involved on how the ecologic needs of fishers can be incorporated into forest management plans. More information about this exciting project is available at the Idaho Conservation League website at <http://www.wildidaho.org/>



Fisher tracks in snow.

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Take Your Child Outdoors!

Vicky Runnoe, *Conservation Education Supervisor, IDFG*



For many of us, being outdoors is second nature. We can hardly wait for the opportunity to go camping, hiking, fishing, birdwatching, canoeing or a myriad of other outdoor activities. And chances are we have been spending time outdoors since we were kids. Childhoods past were spent outside exploring the vacant lot or neighborhood woods. Families went camping and fishing on weekends and children had the chance to get dirty and wet, to dig for worms and turn over rocks, to lie on a hill and watch the clouds or catch tadpoles by a pond. For today's children, however, time outside has become more and more limited. Recent studies show that this

lack of outdoor time is taking its toll on our children.

Studies show that today's children are largely plugged in, not outside. Children 6 – 11 years old now spend an average of 30 hours per week looking at television or a computer screen. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation study showed that youth spend 6.5 hours each day using electronic equipment in their free time. Physicians believe that such statistics help to explain the dramatic rise in childhood obesity, attention deficit disorders and childhood depression. According to the journal *Psychiatric Services*, a 2003 survey found that antidepressant prescription use for children had doubled in five years. Nearly 33% of American children are overweight; thirty years ago, only 5% of children were considered overweight. If trends continue, it is estimated that by 2010 half of all school-age children will be overweight. These statistics have been linked to decreasing time spent outdoors by many children. "But what," you might ask, "about organized sports such as soccer?" While such activities are certainly beneficial, it has been found that simply being outside spending *unstructured* time is an enormous benefit to the physical and mental health of children.

So, how do we as parents, grandparents, teachers or other adults who care about kids help get our kids outside? Fortunately, it is not difficult, nor expensive to integrate outside time into your child's

day. Start by limiting time spent in front of the television and computer. Encourage your child to play in the yard and provide places for play such as sandboxes or garden spots where she can dig or build. Keep your yard a little on the "wild" side by allowing some space for nature to take its course and where the kids can explore. Kids, dirt and seeds are a great combination so try planting a vegetable or butterfly garden in your yard. Put up some bird feeders and a bird bath to attract neighborhood birds. Make a "yard list" of the birds and other creatures you see in your yard.

Take time to go for walks to nearby parks, nature centers or other green spaces and let your children explore. Go to a nearby pond and let the kids wet a line. If the fish are not biting, walk around the pond or wade at the edge to see what kinds of critters you can find. Let your kids walk in the rain and the snow; look at the stars at night; climb trees and build a stick fort in the yard. Set up a tent and let them spend the night camping in the backyard. The possibilities are endless and all you really need to do is open the door.

The Boise National Forest just announced their new program, "Boise Forest Explorers," which helps promote outdoor time for kids and families. Check out details at their website, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/boise/publications/explorer/index.shtml>. The program is available in both English and Spanish!

12 Idaho Watchable Wildlife Sites Receive Money for Improvements

Sara Focht, *Idaho Watchable Wildlife Program Coordinator, IDFG*

The Idaho Watchable Wildlife Committee distributed over \$28,000 to 12 of Idaho's wildlife viewing sites. Money for these improvements came from the sales of the Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide (Pope, 2003) over the last 4 years and annual contributions from partnering agencies. Funded projects range in scope from new viewing platforms and photo blinds, to improving wheelchair access on site, creating interpretive signs, children's activities, and species checklists. Look for site improvements at a viewing site near you!

Site # 3,7,12,14,16 Group of 5 sites-Coeur d'Alene

Site # 7 Gamlin Lake-Sandpoint

Site # 13 Wolf Lodge Bay-Coeur d'Alene

Site # 21 Wolf Education and Research Center-Winchester

Site # 40 Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge-Nampa

Site # 41 World Center for Birds of Prey-Boise

Site # 44 MK Nature Center-Boise

Site # 46 Boise River WMA/Idaho Bird Observatory-Boise

Site # 55 Hagerman National Fish Hatchery-Hagerman

Site # 59 Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge/Lake Walcott State Park-Rupert

Site # 72 Diamond Valley/Elk Valley Marsh – Soda Springs



Site # 82 Camas National Wildlife Refuge-Hamer

The Idaho Watchable Wildlife Committee is a collaborative group of local, state, and federal agency representatives and conservation organizations

that promotes appreciation for wildlife and their habitats, wildlife-based tourism, and responsible wildlife observation ethics for the citizens and wildlife of Idaho. To support the work of this committee, buy an Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide, and Idaho Wildlife License Plate or make a donation to Windows to Wildlife!

The Wild Life of a Wildlife Technician

Rusty Robinson, Wildlife Technician, IDFG-Upper Snake Region

My summer with Idaho Department of Fish and Game as a non-game wildlife technician was very busy, but I always looked forward to going to work everyday, partly because I never got into a rut. I was constantly working with different animals in different places and never getting stuck doing the same thing. Consequently, I was always learning and being challenged.

I started working at the beginning of May, 2006 with Piute ground squirrels, a very small and protected species of ground squirrel that lives primarily in sage brush. My job was to find them and document their colonies. Thirty one new colonies were found in the Upper Snake region!

I began June with a combination of small mammal trapping and amphibian surveys. For three weeks I set traps at Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area. I set approximately 100 traps in a different habitat area each week. I would bait traps at night, check them in the morning, record the data, and release the animals. After all the traps were attended to, I would conduct amphibian surveys during the day, which involves wading around a pond

or stream catching and identifying amphibians and their eggs. Whenever a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" was identified such as a Leopard Frog or Boreal Toad it was reported to the Conservation Data Center. These "multi-species" days were sometimes very busy. On one occasion I woke up at 4:30 AM to check the small mammal traps, attended a training meeting, surveyed amphibians, baited the small mammal traps, netted bats on the South Fork of the Snake River, and finally returned to my camp site at 1:30 AM to sleep fast and check my traps the next day.

Throughout the summer I also conducted peregrine falcon surveys. These surveys involved watching a cliff or nesting tower for several hours and determining if a breeding pair of peregrines was present and, if so, counting how many fledglings were present. The fledgling counts were done towards the end of July or early August, and it was fun to see the little falcons. When working with peregrines I often found myself in the most secluded and beautiful parts of eastern Idaho.

Needless to say, my summer was very busy and exciting. In addition to

the previously mentioned activities, I also participated in bear education, pygmy rabbit surveys, swan surveys, mine surveys for bats in the Lost River Ranges, wolf surveys, and a number of other odds and ends. When all was said and done more was *done* than can ever be said, and I gained a greater knowledge and appreciation of Idaho's sometimes-overlooked wildlife.

Rusty Robinson is well into his second summer with Idaho Department of Fish and Game. He is keeping as busy as he was last summer by working on ground squirrel surveys, swan tracking, and bat monitoring. The hours are long, the weather can be arduous, and the pay is usually less than ideal. Idaho's game and nongame wildlife benefit greatly from the work Rusty and other wildlife technicians perform. We thank them!

State Wildlife Grants Boost Work for Nongame Wildlife!

Sara Focht, Watchable Wildlife Program Coordinator, IDFG

State Wildlife Grants (SWG) are awarded twice a year to projects that focus on implementing conservation actions for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and their habitats identified in the 2005 Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. This money comes from an annual Congressional appropriation and requires a 50% match of non-federal funds on the part of the applicant. In June, four projects were awarded SWG dollars.

NatureServe received \$24,000 to validate a model they created to predict the distribution of 17 rare animal species known to occur in Northern Idaho.

The Wildlife Conservation Society was awarded \$30,000 to continue research on the wolverine in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Information already gathered by this project and future information about the impacts of expansions to ski resorts and increasing snowmobile activity will help IDFG conserve not only the wolverine, but the grizzly bear, fisher, Canada lynx, and woodland caribou (all of which are SGCN).

Friends of the Teton River received \$30,000 for a Teton Creek Habitat Restoration Project. The project will increase Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) populations in Teton Creek near Driggs, a critical YCT spawning tributary, by stabilizing the streambed, restoring stream banks and riparian vegetation, improving water quality and fish passage and by enhancing spawning habitat.

Wayne Wakkinen of Idaho Department of Fish and Game was awarded for \$5,200 for a Caribou Movement Analysis / Winter Recreation study. This project will utilize an existing telemetry database that contains 8600+ locations of radio-collared woodland caribou collected from 1987-present to investigate caribou movements and habitat use. The results of this project will be used to help develop a Winter Recreation Plan that the Idaho Panhandle National Forest is currently writing. This plan will include management strategies for caribou, grizzly bears, wolverines, and lynx. Matching funds are being provided by the Idaho Snowmobile Association.

Congratulations to the leaders of these 4 projects. Idaho's SGCN and ultimately all of Idaho's wildlife will benefit from this work!

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Golden Eagle Audubon
Idaho Department of Commerce & Labor
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEW TEEN
CAMP BUILDS
AWARENESS
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Teens age 12-15 will learn about wildlife habitat and ecosystems while experiencing a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities in this new five-day camp offered by Boise Parks & Recreation. Camp meets from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Aug. 13-17.

Participants will hike and bike in the Boise

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Cost is \$76 for Boise City residents; \$117.25 for non-residents. Register online at www.cityofboise.org by clicking "Online Services" and then "Recreation Activity Registration." Or call 384-4486 or stop by Fort Boise Community Center, 700 Robbins Road, just north of the Idaho Elks Rehabilitation Hospital at Fort and 4th Street near downtown Boise.

Thank You to All Contributors

The following people made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or let us know of a tax check-off donation between March 1 - June 1, 2007. This list represents only those marked the contributor box when they donated to the Nongame Program; however, many subscribers not listed here have contributed generously and Idaho's Nongame wildlife thanks you ALL!

Janet Allen

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Howard Wilson

An Outhouse is No Place for a Kestrel!

Beth Waterbury, IDFG, Salmon Region Nongame Biologist

To the great delight of wildlife watchers, nest boxes are readily accepted by many cavity-nesting birds. This remarkable ability to adapt to man-made nesting structures that simulate cozy tree cavities can also get birds in deep, deep trouble. Come spring, cavity-nesting birds begin their search for the perfect nest site that will assure their reproductive success. Sadly, some of these searches lead to literal dead ends. The culprit? Man-made structures such as chimneys, woodstove pipes, and vault toilet vent pipes that beckon and trap unsuspecting cavity-nesters. This past year I have responded to four incidents involving birds entrapped in vents, flues, and worse! A mountain bluebird was successfully released from the mid-section of an outhouse vent pipe after a citizen heard and reported fluttering in the pipe. A common flicker was found dead in a woodstove, with the distraught person reporting they heard scratching noises but couldn't tell where it was coming from. An American kestrel was discovered in the "vault" of a vault toilet, having arrived through the vent pipe. Fortunately, it was able to fly up through the toilet seat toward natural light and out the door to glorious freedom. And this spring, I found a hapless wood duck hen in my own chimney, black with soot and in obvious distress. My husband and I eventually squeezed her through a narrow slot in the chimney grate and released her in a nearby pond.

These incidents suggest to me that entrapment of cavity-nesting birds in man-made structures is a relatively common occurrence, but one that can be easily averted. A simple solution is to install screens over open vents or other apertures to block birds from accessing. For chimneys and wood stoves, install chimney/woodstove caps that fit tightly with no openings that allow small birds such as house wrens or tree swallows to enter. The time and effort spent retrofitting these structures at home and in our parks and public lands will make a difference in preventing these unfortunate—and avoidable—"dead end" mishaps.



Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service

Making Marshes in Moscow

Will Fontaine, AmeriCorps Member/Watersheds Technician, Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute, Moscow

On a cold and cloudy day the nylon insect traps yield only a few inhabitants. The boatmen flail their lengthy appendages as the water drains from beneath them and wait helplessly to be counted, removed, and returned home. On warmer days the traps would hold handfuls of slippery long toed salamanders. Perhaps the critters grew smarter, waiting for the sun, unwilling to let their curiosity of the trap's two convex holes get the better of them one more time; or maybe it's just cold.

Here at the Palouse Clearwater Environmental institute's, Rodeo Drive campus, the new wetlands are coming to life. The bare soil is sprouting an assortment of native grasses, which we over-seeded time and again. Camas bulbs collected from the path of a highway project join this spring surge of growth. A donated grove of Mackenzie and Coyote Willows adorns the banks of our uppermost pond, pleased that they finally found their place.

Habitat for the amphibians that live at 1040 Rodeo Drive underwent some drastic changes last fall. Wetland creatures will now be able to migrate their way through five new wetlands and swales. While setting traps and dip-netting (following the acclaimed agitate and swoop methodology), we found frog and salamander eggs in all but one pond. While planting native trees and shrubs volunteers came across our first adult pacific tree frog of the season, and with any luck tiger salamanders will emerge into our inviting marshes.

We transplanted some bulrush from the Stateline wetlands. The warming of spring coaxed the roots to establish, moving us even closer to a lush riparian habitat. The new life taking hold should make for quite a scene as it unfolds. As always, you are welcome to come and see for yourself.



Photo: Will Fontaine.

Volunteer Randy Stevens with the first frog of Spring.